



Dan Smoot never considered himself to be a Southern conservative, though he was born and reared in Missouri and spent his early adult life in Texas. He was one of the leading conservative voices in the 1960s and hosted a weekly television program titled “The Dan Smoot Report.”

There were once principled men who were willing to carry the conservative standard against seemingly insurmountable odds, even if it meant public ridicule. Smoot was one of those men, and his brand of conservatism was heavily influenced by his time in the South. The giants of conservatism in the post-World War II era—Russell Kirk, Richard Weaver, Henry Regnery, James Kilpatrick, Mel Bradford, et. al.,—understood that much of American conservatism was nurtured in the soil of the South, a region that was slow to adopt the consumerism and multi-nationalism of the mainstream Republican Party. Country club Republicans and their neoconservative allies eventually purged these men from respectable public discourse. America has suffered as a result.

Smoot’s autobiography *People Along the Way* contains interesting tidbits about life in the Great Depression South, among them the common interaction among white and black Southerners. These stories would not be considered politically correct, nor would they be presented by the modern historical profession. They involve everyday white and black Southerners interacting without a hint of racial animosity or spite.

For example, Smoot was a tramp in his late teens, living in “hobo jungles” moving from town to town along the rails looking for work during the lean years of the early depression. He was instructed not to venture into the South by other vagrants. Why? Because the only hobos who could get a helping hand in the South were black. “Down there,” said one hobo, “Negroes could get help and preferential treatment from white folks, who would not give anything but the back of the hand to a white boy like me who was not born and raised there.” Smoot ventured to the South anyway and found Texas to be a paradise. The people were friendly, the weather warm, and everyone was willing to help the poor boy with ripped clothes, worn-out shoes, and a dirty face. Southern hospitality benefitted both races during the Depression.

Smoot also recounted a time he spent picking cotton to earn a nickel. He didn’t last long on the job because he couldn’t do it as well as the black folks who “thoroughly enjoyed” the activity. Smoot described how the black community viewed cotton picking time as a holiday around Dallas. “They would give up jobs, business, almost anything, to be in the cotton patch for the star of picking season. Every year, companies hiring lots of Negroes, and families dependent upon them for domestic help, were hard hit by unannounced mass exertions of Negroes ‘gone to the cotton patch.’”

His time was much different:

**For days I crawled through a field, dragging a cotton sack, picking one row of cotton, alongside a big Negro picking two rows at a time, dragging a sack more than twice the size of mine, cleaning two rows faster and better than I cleaned one. A man of infinite jest, he entertained me, himself, and everyone within ten cotton rows of us, by teasing me about stuffing me into his cotton sack, getting me sneaked in and weighed in as part of his picked cotton, then helping me escape so we could do it all over again all day long. He would pay me half of what he got paid for my weight. We would thus**

**get rich; he, doing all the work; I, doing nothing but loll around in his cotton sack, or rest covered up by cotton in the wagon, waiting to escape.**

Smoot then reflected how he would think of that man and the cotton picking festivals years later when “after Eleanor Roosevelt had made it a fashion among compassionate northerners to grieve over the plight of Negroes ‘in the southern states,’ where one of the many atrocities imposed upon them was being forced to crawl all day on their hands and knees, picking cotton under the broiling sun.”

Smoot described the black communities in 1930s Dallas as well maintained and orderly populated by hard working people with strong families. This does not fit the current “New South” narrative.

Smoot eventually fell in love in Texas and married a native Texian. His portrayal of pre-1960s feminist women would be conspicuously archaic, but it provides a perspective on “women’s rights” long ago lost in the rush to “equalize” men and women. Remember, I was mostly among young Southern women as a teenager:

**Now, in my old age, having seen what I have seen, I am most grateful to God that, in the parts of American where I lived as a teenager, the girls I became acquainted with were performing the role that girls and young women must perform in a civilized society: maintaining for themselves, and enforcing upon boys and men, high standards of sexual morality. Inasmuch as God made males the sexual aggressors, and inasmuch as sexual desire is the most powerful of all human passions, there is only one human agency that can keep society from destroying itself by mindless, degenerate promiscuity: that agency is a high level of sexual morality in women, and, by women, enforced upon men.**

**Too bad that feminists and civil-righters today are dragging women down from their preeminently important, God-given role as keepers of the flame of civilization trying to make women as low as men!**

This is not some bombastic, misogynistic screed, but a carefully reasoned plea for a return to life when women had *more* power than they possess today, even in a “liberated” society. He always considered his wife to be mentally superior, and he believed in strong women. But to Smoot, “strong” was in the sense that women were the morally superior vessels of life, the gatekeepers to proper civilization who could tame men. Smoot believed that, like Augusta Jane Evans’s Edna Earl in *St. Elmo*, it was a woman’s job to ensure that proper civilization survived. Men left to their devices would degenerate into irresponsible, lazy hobos without the soft but firm hand of feminine morality.

Smoot’s parents were sharecroppers. At one point, his father moved the family to La Forge, Missouri where he was the only white man to work a former cotton plantation. “Descendants of whites who had owned it before the War, owned it in the 1920s; and descendants of Negroes who had worked it as slaves, lived on it in the 1920s and, as free hired hands, worked all but our little sharecropped part of it.” They were poor—though he said he never felt that way because there were always poorer people around him—but Smoot enjoyed his time living in log cabins, jaunting through the woods or along the Mississippi River, or harvest festivals and cattle roundups. He read the classics, got a small taste of formal education, and lived the agrarian life as a boy. It taught him independence.

Smoot eventually went to law school and quit, obtained a graduate degree in American studies, joined the FBI (and quit or was fired depending on whom you believe) and became one of the most outspoken conservatives of his day. He once said “an existence without risk is an existence of little worth.” Perhaps this is more true today than in his time with militant political correctness running America and the Southern tradition at even greater risk than when Richard Weaver wrote his famous dissertation *The Southern Tradition at Bay*.

Smoot may not have been the typically Southern man, but it was the South that cut his teeth. Below are two clips from his now infamous Dan Smoot Report and one speech he gave in the 1960s. That speech is important for his perspective on “totalitarian liberals,” apathetic rich conservatives, and the hard-working Americans who tended to support his views. Here is the Southern political tradition in full display. If we could only have some of our giants back....

## Brion McClanahan

Brion McClanahan is the author or co-author of six books, *How Alexander Hamilton Screwed Up America* (Regnery History, 2017), *9 Presidents Who Screwed Up America and Four Who Tried to Save Her* (Regnery History, 2016), *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Founding Fathers*, (Regnery, 2009), *The Founding Fathers Guide to the Constitution* (Regnery History, 2012), *Forgotten Conservatives in American History* (Pelican, 2012), and *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Real American Heroes*, (Regnery, 2012). He received a B.A. in History from Salisbury University in 1997 and an M.A. in History from the University of South Carolina in 1999. He finished his Ph.D. in History at the University of South Carolina in 2006, and had the privilege of being Clyde Wilson's last doctoral student. He lives in Alabama with his wife and three daughters.

[View al](#)